WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. A method for stimulating host defense mechanisms in a mammal, which method comprises administering to the mammal a therapeutically effective amount of an interferon via oromucosal contact, said amount being from about 1500 IU to about 20 x 10^6 IU for a 70 kg human, where said amount is less than an amount which induces a pathological response in the mammal when administered parenterally.

2. A method for treating an autoimmune, mycobacterial, neurodegenerative, parasitic, or viral condition in a mammal which method comprises administering to the mammal a therapeutically effective amount of an interferon via oromucosal contact, said amount being from about 1500 IU to about 20 x 10^6 IU, where said amount is less than an amount which induces a pathological response in the mammal when administered parenterally.

3. A method of claim 1 in which the effective dose of interferon is administered in a single dose.

4. A method of claim 1 in which the effective dose of interferon is administered in a plurality of smaller doses over a period of time sufficient to elicit a response equivalent to that of a single dose.

5. A method of claim 1 in which the dose of interferon is administered continuously over a period of time sufficient to elicit a response equivalent to that of a single dose.

6. A method of claim 1 in which the total dose of interferon is from about 5000 IU to about 20 x 10^6 IU of interferon.

7. A method of claim 1 in which the dose of interferon is from about 1 x 10^4 IU to about 20 x 10^6 IU of interferon.

8. A method of claim 1 in which the dose of interferon is from about from about 1 x 10^4 IU to about 1 x 10^6 IU of interferon.

9. A method of claim 1 further comprising the administration of other cytokines or interferon inducers.

10. A method of claim 1 wherein the interferon comprises a Type I interferon.

11. A method of claim 10 wherein the interferon is selected from the group consisting of IFN-α, IFN-β, IFN-ω, consensus IFN, and mixtures thereof.

12. A method of claim 11 wherein the IFN-α comprises recombinant IFN-α.

13. A method of claim 1 wherein the interferon comprises a Type II interferon.

14. A method of claim 13 wherein the Type II interferon comprises γ-IFN.

15. Interferon composition to stimulate host defense mechanisms in a mammal which comprises a therapeutically effective amount of the interferon adapted for oromucosal contact, said amount being from about 1500 IU to about 20 x 10^6 IU, provided said amount does not induce a pathological response in the mammal when administered parenterally.

16. A composition of claim 15 in unit dosage form comprising from about 5000 IU to about 20 x 10^6 IU of interferon and a pharmaceutically acceptable carrier.

17. A composition of claim 15 comprising from about 1 x 10^4 IU to about 20 x 10^6 IU of interferon.

18. A composition of claim 15 comprising from about 1 x 10^4 IU to about 1 x 10^6 IU of interferon.

add C2

add D1

add G2